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Evaluation

Evaluation of the regional cooperation framework for the Arab States, 2002-2005

Executive summary

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I. Introduction

A. Context

1. On 17 June 2004, at the annual session of the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), held at Geneva from 14 to 25 June 2004, the Associate Administrator committed the organization to undertake an independent evaluation prior to submission of a regional cooperation framework (RCF) for the next cycle with a view to assessing the effectiveness of the current RCF and its component regional programmes. In this context, the Evaluation Office has been requested to report on the findings and recommendations to the Executive Board.

2. The present report provides a summary of the findings of the independent evaluation carried out by the Evaluation Office from March to May 2005. The RCF's envisaged use of partnerships was to include a host of Arab government, civil society, academic and policy institutions. Cross-thematic strategic partnerships were to be established to coincide with the multisectoral approach, the objective being to create synergy by capitalizing on the efforts and resources that UNDP and other organizations can bring to bear on regional development problems. Partnerships with regional organizations, particularly the Arab League and its affiliated institutions and associations, regional development banks such as the African Development Bank and the Islamic Development Bank, the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, and the Arab Gulf Programme were to be of central importance. Partnerships with other United Nations organizations, the European Union and the World Bank were also considered crucial.

B. Objectives of the evaluation

3. The main objectives of the evaluation are to: (a) assess the performance of the RCF and specify the development results achieved in the area of policy advice, capacity development and knowledge management within the core results areas on which the regional programme has focused, as well as assessment of the scope and range of strategic partnerships formed; (b) assess the achievement of the intended organizational goals and development results, highlighting key results of outputs and outcomes, lessons learned and good practices; (c) based on the actual results, ascertain how the RCF has contributed to strategically positioning UNDP to establish its comparative advantage or niche as a major upstream global policy adviser for poverty reduction and sustainable human development and as a knowledge-based organization in the region; (d) ascertain the degree of innovation among the initiatives undertaken within the RCF programmed project portfolio, their value addition and contribution to generating and sharing knowledge within UNDP and with programme countries; and (e) develop specific recommendations for the next regional programme for the Arab States.

C. Approach and method

4. The evaluation exercise was overseen by the Evaluation Office with the close involvement of the headquarters of the Regional Bureau for Arab States and was conducted applying a mix of direct and meta-evaluation techniques utilizing the findings of in-depth outcome evaluations of individual programmes conducted in advance of the exercise. Outcome evaluations were available for five of the programmes (see annex). They were supplemented with the direct collection of monitoring data, structured and semi-structured interviews and the review of relevant reports and papers – both produced by the projects themselves and by third parties wherever they were relevant to assessing outcomes and impact.

5. Information on programme outputs was collected from the project staff. Where individual outcome evaluations were not conducted, additional effort was devoted to the collection of project information from project personnel as well as from partners.

Review of documentation

6. All available project and programme documentation pertaining to results were reviewed including: the RCF; Arab Human Development Reports and supporting papers, evaluation report of the previous RCF; relevant Executive Board documentation, project documents; project work plans; strategy and concept papers; progress reports, where available; documentation pertaining to programme results; project outputs, and documentation or project web sites, surveys of perceptions in the region, studies prepared by third parties that are of relevance to UNDP programmes.

The universe of projects considered

7. The evaluation was limited to programmes and activities designed in support of the "three pillars" of the Regional Cooperation Framework (2002-2005) and those that fell outside the three pillars, but were developed as flagship programmes for the duration of the RCF. It also included only those projects funded from regional TRAC (target resource assignment from the core) for most of the RCF period. It therefore excluded:[1] (a) regional programmes funded entirely under the global cooperation framework or the Global Environment Fund (GEF); (b) projects that were designed and implemented to support the broad objectives of previous RCFs and were financially completed prior to the mid-point of the current RCF cycle; and (c) minor projects that were intended for programme support..

8. The evaluation was based on the RCF itself and covered all programme activities outlined in the RCF document, excluding projects that were initiated during the previous RCF but were not mentioned as an integral part of the RCF's design.

Surveys and interviews

9. Additional RCF-level information was obtained through the distribution of a questionnaire to all relevant country offices and regional programme managers. That was then supplemented with semi-structured interviews with UNDP programme

[1] As a result, analysis of the financial parameters of the RCF differs somewhat.

staff in the Regional Bureau for Arab States, Regional Centres, Regional Programme Managers, partners and other stakeholders.

Country office visits and consultations

10. Visits were undertaken by the Evaluation Team to capitals hosting some of the key regional programmes. The evaluation team travelled to Egypt, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic,[2] where consultations were held with:

- Project personnel
- Regional Programme Coordinators of projects hosted in the country
- Project staff
- UNDP staff
- Staff from key ministries involved with UNDP programme activities
- Staff of regional institutions involved with the programme
- Members of civil society organizations involved with programme activities
- Staff of other partner institutions.

11. Telephone interviews were conducted with other offices, including those that did not host any of the regional programmes but were participants/beneficiaries. Triangulation was used for verification throughout the exercise.

Frame of reference

12. Establishing a frame of reference for measuring the performance of the RCF proved particularly challenging, as data was not being collected and monitored for the purpose of assessing outcomes and impact for the period under review. The RFC document itself, individual programme documents and corporate Strategic Results Framework/Results-Oriented Annual Reports (SURF/ROARs) that pertained to relevant years during the RCF were all considered as potentially viable bases for the assessment of performance. In addition, several RCF programmes could be said to contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and targets, particularly:

- Goal 1: Reduction of poverty (the overall stated goal of the RCF)
- Goal 3: Gender equality and empowerment of women, especially as it pertains to education (Programme on Governance in the Arab Region (POGAR), Centre for Arab Women Training and Research (CAWTAR), Primary Education Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Higher Education)
- Goal 6: Reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS (HIV/AIDS Regional Programme in the Arab States (HARPAS))
- Goal 7: Halve the proportion of people without access to safe water (Mediterranean Environmental Technical Assistance Programme (METAP))
- Goal 8: Pertaining to employment of youth and the spread of new technologies (Globalization, ICT for Development in the Arab Region (ICTDAR)).

[2] Travel to Beirut was not possible because of security concerns.

13. Those Millennium Development Goals were used as key reference, although bearing in mind that the contribution of programmes of that magnitude and design would require a much longer period of implementation and substantially more resources in order reasonably to be expected to have an impact on the Millennium Development Goals.

II. Main findings

A. Relevance and positioning

14. The RCF (2002-2005) for Arab States has been used very innovatively by the Regional Director and headquarters staff as an instrument for UNDP to adopt independent positions on development issues for the region, to draw attention to needs that are difficult to address because of their sensitivity, to seek consensus or partial agreement on them and to advocate for change – usually at the national level.

15. The Regional Programme has been used quite effectively as a platform to draw policy makers and leaders of civil society out of their national contexts and to foster dialogue on policy issues that sometimes could not be discussed within the confines of domestic constraints.

16. In terms of their focus on the different service areas identified under the RCF, the majority of the newer flagship projects of the RCF focus heavily on: (a) stock-taking and analysis; (b) knowledge-sharing and dissemination; (c) advocacy and the creation of dialogue; and (d) the fostering of partnerships and networks. Relatively few activities and resources are devoted to policy advice, policy development, capacity-building and pilot projects. That is probably appropriate as the programmes are focused on areas that have until recently rarely been in the official spotlight and have not been discussed openly. In the Arab region, several countries until recently refused to acknowledge the existence of poverty. Governance issues such as those pertaining to democratization, transparency and accountability, independence of the judiciary and the rule of law were essentially taboo as was discussion of the prevalence and the modes of HIV transmission and the nature and size of high-risk groups. Even the quality of education was not extensively debated. Raising the profile of such issues and provoking a debate is therefore to be considered a major achievement in itself and requires a considerable effort; stocktaking, advocacy and dissemination of knowledge is particularly urgent and necessary before one can expect extensive policy reforms and changes in approaches.

17. A move towards policy shifts, development of institutional capacity and even the implementation of domestic resources will probably require more time as new ideas and approaches take hold. Furthermore, such programmes will probably require considerably more resources and a stronger presence at the national level than is currently available under the regional programme.

18. The Arab Human Development Report has, since 2002, been the flagship programme of UNDP for the region. It has at times served as the vanguard for other projects and programmes in the RCF, informing the design of regional programmes and also benefiting from stocktaking and analytical work undertaken by them; there has been a healthy exchange of ideas between them. As the Arab Human

Development Report gains greater currency in the region, there is room for the relationship between the main body of the RCF and the Arab Human Development Report to be further reinforced.

19. Because of the strong emphasis on regional priorities as identified from the independent perspective of the Arab Human Development Report and the regional bureau, the RCF has sought to address issues that are not normally recognized as being within the UNDP corporate thematic areas of focus, such as higher education (knowledge) and economic growth and trade (globalization). Those are areas that are generally viewed as ones in which other multilateral organizations possess a comparative advantage.

20. The strategy adopted under different pillars and regional programmes have of course varied. However, some of the most successful approaches at advocacy have been those that have involved directly approaching those opinion makers and leaders who are both most influential and the ones who are, rightly or wrongly, commonly perceived as the most significant obstacle to progress in the area. Their involvement and buy-in from the very outset has proved critically important to "breaking the silence" under HARPAS for instance, and has enabled removal of potential constraints on dialogue at the regional and even national level.

21. In a region where external involvement in policy-making has been highly controversial and frequently rejected, the RCF has rightly emphasized the use of regional capacities, thereby raising the legitimacy of positions advocated, enabling the programmes to more readily gain traction and acceptance. On the other hand, failure to involve policy makers in the design of the programme from the very outset has limited the degree of legitimacy and ownership that the RCF has been able to generate.

22. The level of sensitivity involved has prevented the Bureau from seeking and accepting external funding from several potential sources and the proportion of cost sharing has been relatively low despite strong international interest.

23. From data provided by the regional programme mangers, it would appear that parallel funding of programmes by other donors has been high, demonstrating both the ability of the UNDP regional programme to mobilize resources in support of causes that it has advocated and the high level of interest among partners. There has, however, been relatively little direct cost sharing through UNDP.

24. The regional programme has succeeded in positioning UNDP effectively in sensitive areas such as HIV/AIDS, information and communications technology (ICT), and governance. Indeed, it has been used skilfully to gain credibility and trust on the part of UNDP in a region where the United Nations has been viewed with considerable suspicion. That is no mean feat and warrants considerable praise.

25. More could be done to utilize the results of the regional programme to effectively position UNDP at the country level. As discussed under the section on management, currently, the linkages between the regional and country programmes are largely non-existent. That has probably resulted in lost opportunities for gaining leverage and long-term impact particularly in thematic areas such as governance, in which UNDP also has rather extensive programme activities at the country level.

B. Design

26. The RCF (2002-2005) was designed to cover three thematic pillars (governance, globalization and knowledge) and eight "service areas" or types of activities: (a) stocktaking; (b) knowledge-sharing and dissemination; (c) advocacy and fostering dialogue; (d) policy advice; (e) policy development; (f) capacity-building; (g) implementation of pilot schemes; and (h) the fostering of partnerships and networks.

27. All three pillars are said to contribute to poverty reduction although it is not clear from the design of the actual programmes how that was to be achieved. Coherence and the relationship between the pillars themselves are relatively unclear and while some programmes could be said to address multiple pillars, that has perhaps been more by chance than by design.

28. The principal emphasis of programmes under the RCF has been on stocktaking and advocacy. The issue of national ownership and sustainability of activities from the very outset has not been a principal driving force or a key objective. The programmes are instead designed to provoke discussion on key developmental issues, to foster and promote civil society networks for the purpose of dialogue and advocacy and to create momentum for policy change.

29. In contrast with most of the other UNDP programmes, the RCF for Arab States was largely designed in New York and subsequently submitted for consultation and support from potential participants. Country office involvement in the original design of the programme was not strong. A Regional Advisory Board was established to support the preparation of the Arab Human Development Report. Although the issues identified under the Arab Human Development Report are closely associated with those addressed by projects under the RCF, the Regional Advisory Board was not very actively involved in the design of the RCF.

30. The process followed in the design of the RCF has probably been quite deliberate and has enabled the RCF to address issues of considerable sensitivity (e.g., aspects of democratic governance, gender and HIV/AIDS) that almost certainly would not have been included if government priorities and clearances had been sought a priori.

31. It would appear that in most instances that has not proved a significant problem and Governments have subsequently agreed to participate in the UNDP programmes. Indeed with the strong support of Regional Bureau for Arab States headquarters and the Regional Director in particular, most of the flagship programmes have achieved very high-level participation and have subsequently also received very high levels of entry within individual countries themselves.

32. The absence of strong regional institutions has made it difficult for the regional programme to find a clear counterpart for its inter-country operations. An effort has been made to cultivate the League of Arab States as a counterpart institution, but results have been mixed. Nevertheless, the League of Arab States has provided a forum for joint ministerial declarations in support of positions advocated by UNDP under the regional programme. The extent to which those declarations have translated into actual action at the country level is not clear.

C. Results

33. Two out of three thematic pillars have yielded results, as have some of the programmes, such as the HIV/AIDS programme, that fall outside the three pillars. Some of these results have been quite spectacular as in the case of the inter-faith conference of some of the highest-level religious leaders of the region who broke the taboo of discussing the problem of HIV/AIDS in the region and adopted a declaration that, among other things, went a long way towards removing barriers to more open discussion and projects for prevention and control of the disease.

34. Projects under the globalization pillar were launched briefly, but were closed shortly thereafter and have not had any lasting results despite an obvious need for assistance in a region in which many of the countries are due to join the WTO within the coming years.

35. The regional programme has demonstrated results in the area of thematic or sectoral stocktaking and analysis, advocacy and the fostering of dialogue. There have been relatively few long-term, sustainable results in the area of capacity-building or piloting. In some instances, this has been because of the relative emphasis of the programmes themselves and in others because of the short life of the projects to date.

36. The Regional Programme for Arab States is dominated by the Arab Human Development Report. Indeed, as far as the "Arab Street" is concerned, it is probably fair to say that UNDP *is* the Arab Human Development Report. While each and every Arab Human Development Report has provoked a huge amount of controversy and criticism from the outset including overt and not so overt efforts to stop their publication, it is remarkable how they have also become the centre of discussion at both the regional and national levels, and have rapidly gained currency as institutions in the region, and even some Governments have acknowledged the importance of issues raised and have begun to work on them.

37. HARPAS and the POGAR programme have also made significant breakthroughs, creating awareness among key opinion-makers in the region as a result of their advocacy as measured by the nature and level of dialogue generated at the regional and in many cases, the national level as well. There have been instances of national policies and legislation being adjusted following dialogue that was generated by the UNDP programmes.

38. Direct causal linkages between advocacy and dialogue generated under the regional programme and actual policy changes are difficult to establish with certainty, although there are several instances of changes in policy having taken place after they were discussed openly for the first time under the UNDP regional programme and therefore causality can be inferred. For instance, the TIMSS programme prompted the Ministry of Education in Egypt to make changes in curricula and teacher training programmes.

39. There is probably only one clear example of a regional project having inspired or generated a corresponding project at the national level. This is the case of an ICT project for the visually impaired in the Syrian Arab Republic that was launched as a result of the work of ICTDAR.

D. Management issues

40. The regional programme is managed in RBAS in parallel with relatively few, or no inter-linkage with the country programmes. Regional project mangers report directly to regional programme advisers at RBAS headquarters in New York and are, in some instances, also supported by the SURF in Beirut. Regional Project Managers/Coordinators do not report through Resident Representatives in the countries that host their programmes. Regional programme managers and indeed even regional programme advisers at the Regional Bureau for Arab States headquarters appear to have very limited substantive, planned interaction thereby reducing the overall coherence and synergies between programmes.

41. Regional Programme Managers/Coordinators usually deal directly with government, civil society and private sector contacts, often without keeping UNDP country offices informed or involved. In fact there is evidence that one particular Regional Programme Manager/Coordinator has made it a point of letting Resident Representatives know that he has very little to do with them and is not accountable to them for his actions – even in their country of responsibility. The result is that while Resident Representatives and their staff are uniformly supportive and strongly praise the AHDR, they are unaware of, and have little or no ownership of the regional programmes under the RCF. While they are partially aware of some of the activities of the regional programmes that are hosted in their own countries, they are not at all aware of the regional programmes that are hosted elsewhere. Linkages between the country programme and the regional programme is weak and there is relatively little follow-up at the country level to ensure that advocacy at the regional level is transformed into action at the country level.

42. Support to regional programmes is not written into country office work plans and there is currently relatively little incentive for country offices to support or interact with the regional programmes.

43. Most projects are inadequately staffed and as a result cannot provide the necessary follow-up to ensure that momentum gained at the regional level is always translated into action on the ground. Because there is a relatively low level of ownership at the national level, the sustainability of many of the results beyond the life of the projects may also be in question.

III. Lessons learned and emerging issues

44. The RCF was largely prepared internally – within RBAS headquarters -- with relatively limited discussion even with Resident Representatives and country offices. No extensive process of consultation was held with government officials to review and seek endorsement of the RCF prior to its submission to the Executive Board, unlike the case of earlier regional programmes. Rather, individual programmes were submitted for governmental review and signature only once they had been designed and drafted. Almost without exception, external consultants and UNDP staff drafted the project documents of flagship programmes. Signature by Governments was, in most cases, obtained from the majority of countries and this was accepted as "buy-in" on the part of the participating countries.

45. There is room for more synergy between regional programmes. Programmes tend to be more active in their host country and there is a perception among those countries that do not host programmes that they are "forgotten" and do not benefit from the RCF.

46. While flexibility in design has enabled programmes to seize opportunities as they arise and as needs change, they have also led to insufficient long-term strategizing and planning. Some projects have continued to undertake advocacy programmes for years on end without a phased approach to ensuring that the advocacy translates into real change at the country level.

47. In terms of resource mobilization, while there is some evidence that the success of the regional programmes has resulted in the generation of considerable parallel funding, the volume of cost sharing actually channelled through UNDP has been relatively limited. This may in part be due to a conscious effort on the part of UNDP to avoid giving the impression of being influenced by other parties.

48. Despite the absence of special linkages to the country office in the host country, the programmes tend to be more active in their host country and there is a perception among those countries that do not host programmes that they are "forgotten" and do not benefit from the RCF. Regional programmes are generally understaffed to meet a growing demand for their services.

49. Relatively little value added can be discerned from UNOPS execution. Support costs associated with UNOPS execution have also hindered resource mobilization in the form of cost sharing, thereby hindering the Regional Programme's ability to meet growing needs directly.

50. Monitoring systems are not explicitly provided for in the budget of projects and as a result the types of indicators that could provide information about outcomes and impact are not systematically collected. The new UNDP guidelines pertaining to monitoring and progress reports have resulted in progress being recorded in very different ways by different projects. In some instances they are monitored in the form of work plans and in others they are produced in the form of public information documents which do not, of course, highlight any shortcomings or problems faced.

51. There is no clear counterpart for Regional Programmes in member governments or focal points in UNDP country offices. The result is that both the government (except relevant sections of some line ministries) and UNDP country offices know relatively little about the regional programme, and reviews of performance are only undertaken between the project staff and RBAS headquarters.

IV. Recommendations

Design, relevance and positioning

52. Based on the findings of the evaluation, the recommendations set out below are presented for consideration.

1. **Future regional cooperation frameworks should focus on programme activities that lend themselves best to regional, inter-country collaboration,**

applying the following criteria:

- They are likely to achieve more progress by removing them from the domestic context and addressing them on an inter-country platform
- They would be likely to compromise UNDP positioning if first broached at the national level
- They address issues with trans-border/international dimensions
- They can be addressed within UNDP practice areas
- They require international management – at least in some aspects
- They receive initial interest from two or more countries.

2. The Bureau may wish to consider not renewing programmes that are not clearly in support of its pillars, as currently defined, or its broader global mandate.

3. Particularly in view of the need to dovetail the RCF/RP with country cooperation frameworks/country programmes, there is a need to increasingly focus UNDP regional programmes on UNDP corporate "practice areas". A phased strategy needs to be prepared for most programmes and in particular for those that are outside the UNDP core practice areas with a view to their full-fledged institutionalization and an exit strategy that ensures that achievements are consolidated and sustained.

4. UNDP should move even farther towards using the Arab Human Development Report and RCF as an advocacy tool geared to analysis of issues, dissemination of information, active advocacy and dialogue and the creation of partnerships and networks. Policy advice, policy development, capacity-building and piloting should be even more systematically implemented under country programmes.

5. This requires more active programming in conjunction with country programmes (despite differences in programming cycles) and effective dovetailing between the regional (RCF/RP) and country programmes (CCF/CP).

6. UNDP may wish to consider using the Arab Human Development Reports as the overarching strategic framework to guide conceptualization and strategic positioning of the RCF, so as to provide thematic coherence to the RCF as a whole in the light of critical deficits identified in the region; to address "sensitive" issues while increasing likelihood of regional buy-in (since contributors to Arab Human Development Reports are regarded as authoritative analysts of the region); to concretize the findings of the Arab Human Development Reports in real projects; and, to provide avenues for long-term programmes in the region.

7. The Arab Human Development Report has gained a great deal of visibility and recognition for UNDP. Indeed it is synonymous with UNDP in the region. Despite the high level of initial resistance that each report has met, over time they have all gained increasing currency and acceptance both within the region and among donors. Institutionalization of the Arab Human Development Report in a regional institution would probably not be advisable

if UNDP continues to wish to use it under its own brand name and as the driving force – an advocacy vanguard – for its own programming work.

8. At the corporate level, UNDP has tended to move rapidly from one area of focus to another. In order to have a significant impact in the complex and sensitive areas that it has identified under the RCF, a concerted, continuous effort will be required. Further advocacy is probably required on issues pertaining to distribution, equity and gender as well as in the area of employment and economic growth – particularly as it pertains to increasing globalization.

9. Work under most of the RCF pillars is at a relatively early stage in that there needs to be considerably more progress and there is ample room for further pursuing advocacy and dialogue to ensure continued movement. Activities entered into under the UNDP flagship programmes, most especially pertaining to those programmes that were launched in the last four years, should continue.

10. In the case of some projects such as Higher Education, programme activities should move on to the next stage with a stronger focus on institutionalization of testing in a regional institution, standardization of testing throughout the region using the system and procedures established, and adjustment of educational policies and standards. Other flagship projects will need to continue focusing on advocacy and the fostering of dialogue.

11. The globalization pillar is of obvious relevance to the region as trade practices and patterns change, as countries aspire to access WTO and as the region becomes increasingly integrated into the globalization phenomenon and as this integration begins to have an even more pronounced effect on employment, economic growth and sustainable development. It is essential, however, that UNDP advocacy should be to set up programmes in areas in which UNDP is recognized as having a niche. Failure to do so will result in UNDP being marginalized by other big players (WTO, the World Bank, the IMF, regional banks and the EU).

12. The Regional Bureau for Arab States and Arab Human Development Report Advisory Committee should be brought more systematically into the process of designing and programming the RCF/RP in the future in order to ensure continuity and coherence.

13. Perhaps the biggest challenge is to find a regional institution that can serve, not so much as a counterpart, but as a sounding board and mechanism for validation of UNDP regional efforts. The League of Arab States remains one obvious choice despite its limitations. UNDP may wish to consult it during the programming of the next RCF. This consultation should take a form that would enable the League of Arab States and its ministerial network to serve as a sounding board for ideas for inclusion in the RCF/RP.

14. UNDP may wish to consider providing support to the League of Arab States in its new reform programme with a view to strengthening it as a partner institution for the RCF/RP.

15. Programmes that have received the highest marks from Governments of the region have inevitably been those that require the international management of resources, where national policies and practices alone are

insufficient. Consideration should be given to providing support to some programmes that not only benefit from regional advocacy, but also focus on issues or programmes that require trans-border collaboration in their management. For instance, the issue of water management/governance is not only of critical importance to the region, but also requires trans-border management. Joint management of river basins for instance, have also proved to be an effective basis for regional programmes in other regions (see the experience of Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific and Regional Bureau for Latin America and Caribbean) and may also be considered in the Regional Bureau Arab States – perhaps in collaboration with the regional programme in Regional Bureau Africa where appropriate.

Management issues

16. The Regional Bureau for Arab States needs to urgently establish a mechanism to ensure more systematic and active contact and collaboration between Regional Bureau headquarters, the SURF, regional programme staff and country offices in the design and management of the RCF/RP. Collaboration across pillars should also be enhanced among Regional Bureau staff under the leadership of the new Regional Division Chief.

17. Consideration should be given to appointing Deputy Resident Representatives as "Regional Focal Points" with the responsibility of: (a) being aware of all Regional Bureau for Arab States regional programme activities as they pertain to their countries; (b) communicating with relevant Regional Programme Coordinators; (c) organizing operational and substantive support/interaction from the country level; and (d) ensuring programmatic synergy with country programmes wherever appropriate. Regional Bureau headquarters staff and Regional Programme Coordinators should go out of their way to ensure that Regional Focal Points are kept informed of activities as they pertain to their countries and that they are consulted.

18. A strategic plan should be developed to accompany the next Regional Programme for establishing "national ownership" of programmes and to ensure legitimacy and sustainability in the long-term. This should include a structured programme of consultation at the country level that will raise awareness of the RCF/RP and further bolster its synergy with national programmes.

19. Consideration should be given to establishing a fund that is geared to translating advocacy and dialogue undertaken at the regional level into policy advisory work, policy development, capacity-building and pilot programmes at the country level. This fund should be at least partially funded from the regional TRAC resources and priorities for its use should be identified and implemented in close collaboration with country offices of the region.

20. More active efforts need to be taken to ensure that programme design and implementation involves non-host countries to ensure that they, too, benefit from the RCF/RP.

21. Clarify and strategize relationship and collaboration between RCF programmes and other agencies working on issues – especially other United

Nations agencies – to avoid duplication, maximize impact of regional programmes, utilize strategic strengths of programme, expand across the region, etc.

22. Build in mechanisms for developing more "synergy" between related regional programmes so as to optimize strategic impact of each and achieve overall results.

23. Allocate responsibility to country offices for functions they can perform, for example, capacity-building, operationalizing at the national level, monitoring and evaluation, etc., and free regional programmes to concentrate on the wider policy elements of the programmes and impact on reforms and change.

24. Identify and work with regional institutions that can serve as a sounding board for issues, projects and concepts developed under UNDP's regional programmes.

25. While there is a need to preserve flexibility and seize opportunities as they arise, there is also a need for UNDP regional programmes to identify issues that can gain real traction and to develop medium-term, phased strategies to see them through to fruition and until they result in significant policy shifts and institutional change at the country level.

26. The substantive value added of having UNOPS as an executing agency under the RCF/RP is unclear and largely preserved for bureaucratic reasons. Its current role is limited to administration and financial management. There has been apparent difficulty in obtaining expenditure records from UNOPS in a timely manner and UNDP RBAS has been forced to keep its own duplicate records, which are unlikely to include more than estimates as actual expenditure records are maintained by UNOPS. Given the development of the UNDP Regional Service Centre, the SURF and substantive backstopping capacity at the Regional Bureau headquarters, more direct programme management mechanisms should be considered with the support of the Executive Board if necessary.

Monitoring, evaluation and the systematic assessment of performance

27. Develop more systematic mechanisms complete with line item in project budgets for establishing dedicated monitoring and evaluation systems to collect baseline data and track indicators that can provide information pertaining to the outcomes and impact of UNDP regional programmes. A standardized format for internal progress reporting needs to be reintroduced and used as a tool for programme management and decision-making.

28. A separate programme should be developed and paid for from TRAC resources to undertake the systematic monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes and impact of both the RCF as a whole as well as its constituent regional programmes. The programme should provide for (a) the selection of indicators; (b) the establishment of mechanisms for the collection, collation and analysis of data; (c) the establishment of a baseline for the RCF as a whole as well as individual programmes; (d) the collection, analysis and reporting on

data on a regular, periodic basis; and (e) the use of the information gathered for programming and decision-making purposes as well as public relations and resource mobilization, as necessary.

29. The viability of establishing a regional institution (e.g., for the monitoring and evaluation of development and the implementation of national plans and programmes of action should be explored. If sufficient interest exists, the UNDP may wish to consider providing support for developing the capacity of such an institution.

V. Conclusion

53. Regional programmes have, in the past, been used by Regional Bureaux at UNDP as a facility to address issues of cross-border significance that need to be jointly addressed by concerned countries. Technical programmes such as international telecommunications, civil aviation and management of river basins across multiple riparian states and other projects requiring international management have constituted the "bread and butter" of regional programmes. Some of the older projects under this RCF, such as METAP, fall within this category.

54. Earlier regional programmes have also been subject to extensive a priori consultation and negotiation with Governments of Member States (for instance by soliciting project ideas from countries in the region and by holding ministerial conferences to seek endorsement of programme ideas and strategies) and have been managed jointly by the Regional Bureau headquarters and country offices. This has, however, tended to preclude them from addressing cutting-edge development issues and to focus them on the creation and strengthening of international institutions of a regional or subregional nature. The RCF (2002-2005) has made a bold break with the past in that it has (a) focused on cutting-edge issues that are generally not officially acknowledged or discussed openly within countries of the region, but are of direct relevance to much of the population; (b) focused heavily on stocktaking and analysis, advocacy of best practices and policy positions aimed at overcoming critical human development deficits, creating vigorous dialogue at the regional and country levels and the promulgation of civil society partnerships to reinforce the effectiveness of the advocacy work; and (c) managed the RCF almost exclusively from RBAS headquarters with a view to ensuring coherence and strength of the message.

55. As such, the RCF (2002 – 2005) has been a bold experiment aimed at influencing and altering the policies and priorities for development in the region while eschewing a priori ownership and buy-in. It is one distinctive model for a "new UNDP" that in addition to ensuring long-term capacity development with full national ownership, is also prepared to advocate strongly for issues that are of developmental importance despite early political resistance and where the regional programme, which traditionally has had less clearly defined ownership at the country level, is used as the instrument to lead the advocacy process.

56. Flexibility has been an important feature of the regional programme design. None of the flagship programmes, such as POGAR, ICTDAR, HARPAS, CAWTAR, have adhered to a fixed strategy. Like all good advocacy programmes, they have sought opportunities and openings, which by their very nature are rarely static. On the other hand, several opportunities that have arisen require concerted, long-term action under the new regional programme in order to be successful and would benefit greatly from longer-term

planning with a phased approach beginning with advocacy and dialogue through partnership development and ending in policy change, institutional reform and capacity development. Such longer-term planning would also enable better integration and programmatic dovetailing with country programmes that are better equipped to undertake the policy change, institutional reform and capacity development activities that require concerted action at the country level.

Annex

Outcome of evaluations undertaken			
Number	Title	Location	Description
RAB/99/005	Programme on Governance in the Arab Region (POGAR)	Beirut	Promotes good governance in the region, including rule of law and participation, transparency and accountability through policy advice, capacity-building and pilot projects
RAB/01/005	Primary Education Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)	New York	Collection of information on education at all levels in the region with a view to improving the quality and scope of education
RAB/02/001	Centre for Arab Women Training and Research (CAWTAR), Phase II	Tunis	Research and field studies on gender issues and the collection and analysis of statistics pertaining to women's economic, social and political conditions
RAB/02/003	ICT for Development in the Arab Region (ICTDAR)	Cairo	Awareness raising and stakeholder campaigns. Capacity building. Pro-poor growth and employment generation focusing on ICT in small and medium-size enterprises. Digital initiatives for poverty reduction
RAB/02/MO1	HIV/AIDS Regional Programme in the Arab States (HARPAS)	Cairo	Create heightened awareness and build commitment in the fight against HIV/AIDS. High priority, catalytic regional interventions to pave the way for country-level follow-up